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***German Life and Letters* 2016, 69(4), 453-467.**

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DOI link to article:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/glal.12130>

Date deposited:

22/09/2016

Embargo release date:

07 September 2018

'DER MANN, DEN ICH VERGÖTTERTE, HAT UNS INS UNGLÜCK GEFÜHRT':¹

THE POST-WAR CRISIS OF CONSCIOUSNESS AS MIRRORED IN ESSAYS AND
QUESTIONNAIRES BY NUREMBERG'S SCHOOL CHILDREN IN 1946

BEATE MÜLLER

ABSTRACT

In 1946, Nuremberg's schools inspector Otto Barthel had local school children write essays on their wartime experiences. They were also asked to fill in questionnaires which specifically addressed their political attitudes. About 3,000 pupils submitted their work. The texts tell a complex story about the thoughts and feelings of German adolescents in the early post-war period, demonstrating the ideological influence of National Socialism, trauma suffered during the war, as well as the shock, frustration, and disorientation after the collapse of the Third Reich. Whilst in many of the questionnaires, the wrongs of National Socialism are clearly identified, the essays tend to be more evasive. They display coping strategies such as idealisation of life before the war, denial, withdrawal from politics altogether, turning to religion for ethical and moral orientation, portraying Germans as victims, relativising German atrocities in the face of Allied military actions and occupation policy, as well as devotion to diligence, hard work and moral fortitude in order to overcome material deprivation and to regain respect in the world. Although the young pointed to their own youth to exonerate themselves from political responsibility, they also inscribed themselves into the conflicted world of adult Germans in a defeated Germany, with their narratives and questionnaire

responses already containing many of the discursive tenets of German 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung'.

Im Jahre 1946 ließ der Nürnberger Schulrat Otto Barthel die Schüler der städtischen Schulen Aufsätze schreiben über ihre Kriegserlebnisse. Die Kinder hatten auch Fragebögen auszufüllen, die ausdrücklich ihre politischen Einstellungen erkundeten. Rund 3000 Schüler reichten ihre Arbeiten ein. Diese Texte vermitteln ein komplexes Bild von den Gedanken und Gefühlen der deutschen Jugendlichen in der frühen Nachkriegszeit. Sie veranschaulichen den ideologischen Einfluss des Nationalsozialismus, im Krieg erlittene Traumata, sowie den Schock, die Frustration und Desorientierung nach dem Zusammenbruch des Dritten Reichs. Während in vielen Fragebögen die Verfehlungen des Nationalsozialismus klar identifiziert werden, sind die Aufsätze in diesem Punkt meist eher ausweichend. Sie zeigen Bewältigungsstrategien wie Idealisierung der Vorkriegszeit, Verleugnung, Rückzug von der Politik, Hinwendung zur Religion als Sinnstifterin, Darstellung der Deutschen als Opfer, Relativierung deutscher Gräueltaten angesichts militärischer Handlungen und der Besatzungspolitik der Alliierten, sowie eine Hinwendung zu Fleiß, harter Arbeit und moralischer Rechtschaffenheit zwecks Überwindung materieller Not und Wiedergewinnung von Respekt in der Welt. Obwohl die Jugendlichen auf ihre Jugend verwiesen, um sich von politischer Verantwortung zu befreien, schrieben sie sich auch in die konfliktträchtige Welt der Erwachsenen im besiegten Deutschland ein. Ihre Narrative und Fragebogenantworten enthielten bereits viele der diskursiven Topoi deutscher Vergangenheitsbewältigung.

CONTEXT OF BARTHEL'S PROJECT

After Germany's capitulation, the Allies faced huge challenges on the ground in a defeated country suffering from the effects of large-scale destruction. Improving housing and infrastructure, providing sufficient food rations, ensuring public health and safety as well as supporting economic progress were of prime importance. Alongside those urgent practical concerns were more expressly political goals: not only reforming the legal, political and administrative systems but – in pursuit of the 'central goal of the Occupation'² – reorienting the German population toward democracy. Strict controls of the media, pro-democracy propaganda, and measures taken to denazify public life and the public sector in particular were meant to reeducate the Germans.

One particular concern in this context was schooling and education, which had been completely permeated by Nazi ideology. In the occupation years, the children and adolescents attending school were of a generation that had been born and bred under the Nazis, and their ideological (re)orientation was seen as especially important, because they represented the future of the country. It is therefore not surprising to read that the express objective of the Americans was 'to take control of the German educational system and thoroughly to de-Nazify and de-militarize it'.³ All German schools were to be closed and reopened 'only when the Supreme Commander is satisfied that they have been freed from Nazism and militarism, that all undesirable teachers have been eliminated and that an adequate supply of satisfactory teaching materials, including textbooks, is available'.⁴ All teaching staff had to undergo screening before being licensed to work in their profession again. As a result, many teachers lost their jobs, at least initially. Thus, in the American zone, about half of the teachers were removed by 1946.⁵

But this political cleansing also helped some teachers gain influence. In Nuremberg, former headteacher Otto Barthel was promoted to the position of 'Schulrat' by the Americans, who regarded Barthel as 'untainted by Nazism'.⁶ Overseeing the local schools was no easy task. In his book on schools in Nuremberg, Barthel pointed out that only two out of 114 municipal school buildings had been left undamaged by air raids, that as many as 44 schools had been completely destroyed and that many more were severely damaged so that in the autumn of 1945, when schools reopened, there were just over 100 teaching rooms for 25,000 pupils.⁷ Helen Liddell has described 'formal education' in post-war Germany as having been 'handicapped by the three shortages – teachers, buildings, books and materials', especially in the American zone.⁸ In addition, there were insufficient supplies of shoes, food, or coal with which to heat the classrooms.

What is remarkable about Barthel's work as a schools inspector, however, are not so much his efforts to solve a host of practical problems afflicting local schools but his initiative to obtain from the city's pupils essays and questionnaires about their wartime experiences and their political attitudes. It is not entirely clear what lay behind this project. In a letter of 2 December 1946 to the 'Regierungspräsident' in Ansbach, Barthel explained:

Im Anschluß an den Geschichtslehrplan für Heimatgeschichte wurde aus psychologischen und geschichtlichen Gründen angeregt, von sämtlichen Schülern im Rahmen des allgemeinen Aufsatzunterrichtes in den nächsten Wochen wie in Beilage 2 und 3 angegebenen [sic] Aufsätze zu fertigen. Es ist geplant, das eingehende Material einer Reihe von Universitäten, psychologischen und pädagogischen Schriftstellern zur Bearbeitung zu übergeben, um auf diese Weise ein Gesamtbild über die Struktur der Jugend von Heute in den fraglichen Jahrgängen zu gewinnen und außerdem wertvolles Material für eine künftige Geschichtsschreibung zur

Verfügung zu stellen. Gerade Nürnberg, das wie kaum eine andere Stadt unersetzliche Verluste erlitten hat, kommt hierfür wohl erstlinig in Frage. (StadtAN E10/1/147)

Contrary to these professed dissemination plans, the pupils' submissions became part of Barthel's private papers, only posthumously to be incorporated into Nuremberg's municipal archive. This implies that the project had been his personal brainchild, rather than having been carried out at the behest of the Americans who in any case had their own Public Information Office to conduct surveys on what the German population thought about a range of issues.⁹ Barthel edited the style of many of the essays, which indicates that he might have wanted to publish a selection (although he never did); he also quoted from a few of the texts in his aforementioned monograph on Nuremberg schools.

The potential parameters of analysis for such a collection of school essays and questionnaires are wide-ranging. They encompass, *inter alia*, (1) a sociological analysis of differences potentially attributable to the respondents' age, gender, the type of school they attended, and their social and political background; (2) close readings of the primary material for structure, style and rhetoric, for genre conventions of the school essay or signs of adult interference; (3) comparative readings of these texts and other, similar writings such as life story writing, autobiography, and testimony; (4) psychologically oriented thematic readings for the dominant versus the latent or repressed topics of the texts; (5) comparisons of the essays' political stance with correlating views expressed in the questionnaires; (6) analyses of the relationship between the adolescents' reflections on the war and emerging discourses of 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung'; as well as (7) a contextualisation of Barthel's project in the Americans' reeducation programme. The historical context of the collection and its political content make the latter approaches particularly pertinent.

Recent scholarship on the reeducation programme has reevaluated the Allies' efforts aimed at democratising the young, inscribing the desired political reorientation into narratives of German 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung'. Thus, Brian M. Puaca emphasises the transformative, positive effects of educational reforms in occupied Germany for the democratisation of the country by charting the development at local level of anti-authoritarian and anti-nationalistic educational institutions, publications, curricula and training programmes. Puaca sees these developments as helping to foster the democratic reorientation of the young and thus paving the way for West Germany's culture of democracy.¹⁰ By contrast, Jaimey Fisher offers a more sinister analysis of the role of the young in post-war Germany: in his view, discourses about the young as a generation previously seduced by Hitler and now in crisis helped the adults deflect scrutiny away from themselves: 'Youth and particularly youth crises served as discursive sites onto which to displace, and with which to distract from, the wider challenges of coming to terms with Germany's burdensome past.'¹¹

Puaca, Fisher, and others assess the role of reforms for, and of discourses about, the young and place them in the context of post-war politics, thus showing different ways in which the young were functionalised for adult agendas. Such foci sideline the contemporaneous self-representation of the young and how this fits in with political reorientation and 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung'. The reasons behind this are easy to see: after the war, the young did not have a strong, let alone a lasting voice in the public sphere; the more recent flood of memoirs and other ego-documents published by the ageing war generation were mostly penned several decades after the events thus recollected. This is why Barthel's unpublished primary sources offer such an outstanding opportunity for studying what the young voiced just a year and a half after the end of World War II. Their personal narratives also have the advantage that they were not written with a public audience in mind, and although the school context with the teacher as intended reader would have affected the

texts to a greater or lesser extent, one can expect them to be more direct and spontaneous than any text carefully composed and edited for publication.

What I am interested in is how the young saw their own youth in connection with their wartime recollections and their post-war reflections on Germany's past, present, and future. How did the young negotiate the acute crisis of consciousness that came with Germany's defeat, the revelations of German crimes against humanity, the complete political reorientation expected of them by official authorities, the post-war shortages, and their own losses, fears, and hopes for the future? The extent of the shock felt by the young when the Hitler regime collapsed, is palpable in statements such as the following by Lydia G. (1929): "Der Mann, den ich vergötterte, hat uns ins Unglück geführt. Das Kriegsende war für mich erschütternd, ich mußte mir sagen: alles umsonst." (StadtAN E10/1/82/8). The girl's lines exemplify in a nutshell the psychological complexities arising from military defeat: not only had the war effort been 'umsonst', but the confessed adulation of Hitler (and, by extension, the ideology he stood for) also points to the strong affective bond that had fuelled political support. To realise that the formerly beloved 'Führer' was as unworthy of such emotional investment as the aims of National Socialism had been unworthy of approval, must have been experienced as a multifaceted crisis that encompassed pangs of conscience over the support previously lent to the discredited regime, as well as a resultant fundamental undermining of confidence in one's own ability to judge who and what is worthy of support. This crisis of consciousness combined issues of personal morality and integrity with wider political and ideological concerns.

The school essays under consideration here mirror this crisis, as becomes clear when reading them closely, paying attention to dominant stylistic and thematic patterns. Thus, analysing the topics which are foregrounded, sidelined or even ignored in the pupils' texts reveals their young authors' personal and political preoccupations a year and a half after the

end of the war. Given the traumatic nature of wartime experiences many of the pupils endured, and also considering the challenging living conditions and deprivations in the occupation period, what coping mechanisms can be identified in these writings? To what extent do the young align themselves with, or set themselves apart from, their adult compatriots, i.e. do they see themselves as a generation distinct from their elders?

PROFILE OF SUBMISSIONS

Barthel's initiative saw more than 3,000 young respondents write essays about topics such as 'Meine Lebensgeschichte', 'Ein unvergeßliches Ereignis', or 'Was ich über meine Eltern weiß'; in addition, two different questionnaires were used to gather biographical information and to tease out the young people's ideological views. In total, approximately 7,000 items (including numerous drawings) were submitted.

The submissions, whilst numerous and thus statistically viable, are not strictly speaking representative of Nuremberg's youth in 1946, because their authors mostly attended either a 'Volksschule' or a 'Berufsschule' (78 vs. 19 classes respectively); only one set of essays was written by pupils of a local 'Gymnasium'. This means that the more middle-class offspring likely to attend a 'Gymnasium' is underrepresented in the collection. There is, however, a fairly even gender balance, and the texts are also comparable with regard to the pupils' age, because most of them were born around 1930. As far as the essay topics themselves are concerned, there is some inter-school variation. Thus, the adolescents attending the 'Gymnasium' all wrote just one essay, entitled 'Meine Lebensgeschichte', as did most of the pupils who attended the various 'Berufsschulen'. By contrast, the essays written in the 'Volksschulen' comprised a variety of topics, ranging from 'Aus meinem Leben' or 'Mein

Lebenslauf' – akin to the aforementioned essays from pupils going to different types of schools – to essays about the lives of the children's parents, grandparents, or stories about an unforgettable experience. As for the questionnaires, similar difficulties arise. First, Barthel used two different questionnaires; second, not all essays were accompanied by questionnaire responses, and vice versa. The first questionnaire Barthel used in early 1946 seems to have stood on its own as a pilot project, as the few sets of answers to this first questionnaire are not complemented by any essays (StadtAN E10/1/103). By contrast, the later, more extensive questionnaire of autumn 1946 was accompanied by essays.

Despite these differences, the responses resemble each other in numerous respects. With regard to the essays, these correspondences concern both the recurrent salient topics and the style and format in which the young expressed themselves. The most frequent themes in the autobiographical essays are the happy days before the war, life away from home under the evacuation programme 'Kinderlandverschickung' (KLV), the air raids experienced, the worries or sorrows about the fate of male relatives on active service, the end of the war and the arrival of the Americans, as well as post-war shortages, deprivations, fears, and hopes for a better future. By contrast, the essays which portray the lives of other family members seem to differ from each other considerably, at least at first sight, because here, different biographies result in different stories. But beneath the varying surface information given, the essays are again quite comparable, because the adolescents tended to write about their older relatives' youth, about their training and working life, about how they met and married their spouse, about youthful adventures, or about overcoming noteworthy crises such as diseases or accidents. Frequently, the texts follow an adventure or anecdotal storyline, typically centring on happenings such as breaking through the ice of a frozen lake while skating, or pranks such as slipping mustard into the coat pocket of a friend. Traditions pertaining to the genre of the

'Erlebnisaufsatz', such as chronologically arranged events culminating in a climax, but also proverbial sayings or rhetorical phrases, figure in many of the submissions.

Predictably, the essays that give the deepest insights into the young respondents' hearts and minds are the autobiographical ones and those recounting an unforgettable experience, which tends to be of a traumatic, war-related nature. These essays can be regarded as describing what have been termed 'disruptive life events', i.e. 'personal accounts of experiences that fundamentally alter expected biographies'.¹² In the following, I shall identify and illustrate the most salient coping strategies employed by the Nuremberg adolescents to make sense of the upheavals they had undergone. These strategies include idealisation of life before the war, denial, withdrawal from politics altogether, turning to religion or Prusso-Protestant virtues for ethical and moral orientation, portraying Germans as victims, as well as relativising German atrocities in the face of Allied military actions and occupation policy. Whilst a number of these strategies echo their adult compatriots' approaches to the post-war crisis of consciousness, the young also pointed to their own youth in order to exonerate themselves from political responsibility.

COPING STRATEGIES

The autobiographical essays illustrate how much the lives of the adolescents had been affected by the war. This becomes clear even at the level of structural and temporal organisation, for the texts tend to distinguish between their authors' lives before, during, and after the war. Other markers one might expect to find such as landmark birthdays, the transition from primary to secondary school, family holidays, or the birth of siblings either do not feature at all, or are overshadowed by the overarching tripartite structure of Before,

During, and After. Many idealised the time before the war. Thus, Erich A. (born 1934) begins his essay by saying 'Die schönste Zeit war die bis vor dem Kriege.' (StadtAN E10/1/21/1). The boy then describes his family's idyllic summer holidays, with the farmer allowing Erich to join him in the field, to help mind the cows, and the father playing the guitar in the evening. This pastoral idyll is shattered by the outbreak of war: 'Aber mit einem Schlage war alles zu Ende als der Krieg kam. Am 11. März 1940 wurde auch mein Vater Soldat und wir mußten unser Häuschen aufgeben.' As Hannes Heer comments on a comparable story: 'Die schönen Ferienerlebnisse als Wall gegen das Unglück, das dann doch hereinbricht.'¹³ For Heinrich H. (no d.o.b.), the outbreak of war overshadows childhood and school days alike: 'In meinem ersten Schuljahr kam der Krieg. Damit war meine schönste Kinderzeit vorüber.' (StadtAN E10/1/23/10). In these examples, war is presented as a sudden, inexplicable, uncontrollable force that breaks into the children's lives and ends the perceived idyll. As the war progressed, it increasingly interrupted and impacted on mundane, routine activities such as going to school or turning in for the night. Thus, Kurt E. (1934) juxtaposes his daily activities with frightening wartime hostilities: 'kaum waren wir im Schulzimmer, Fliegeralarm auf der Straße, des nachts, kurzum nirgends konnte man Ruhe finden vor den Fliegern.' (StadtAN E10/1/21/3).

At times, the war seems to have been so traumatic that the children did not even mention it in their essays, although their lives had been deeply affected. This form of denial is found in Wilhelm E.'s essay (1932), which does not address the war at all despite the fact that he details in the questionnaire his loss of several relatives as well as extensive bomb damage to his relatives' properties in the war (StadtAN E10/1/23/4). Tellingly, even where life stories are restricted to the mundane or the pastoral, if they are accompanied by drawings at all, these will be drawings of an air raid, which shows the repression governing the essay (e.g. in E10/1/22). The pupils sometimes veer from depressing circumstances and turn toward a more

positive memory instead. Thus, in the second half of Hans S.'s (1934) brief life story, we see a total eclipse of the war when the boy focuses on how he learnt to swim:

Aus meinem Leben kann ich gute und schlechte Zeiten schildern. Im Jahre 1934 erblickte ich das Licht der Welt. Um diese Zeit war mein Vater im K.Z. Meine Mutter arbeitete, um Geld zu verdienen. Bei meiner Großmutter wuchs ich auf. Als ich sechs Jahre alt war, mußte ich mir meine Sachen richten, z.B. Essen wärmen, einheizen und einkaufen. Mit acht Jahren hatte ich ein schönes Erlebnis. Beim Baden im Kanal trugen mich die größeren Kinder auf die Insel in die Mitte des Kanals. In der schönsten Gaudi kam ein Polizist. Nun ließen meine Kameraden mich im Stich, in meiner Angst sprang ich ins Wasser und konnte schwimmen. (StadtAN E10/1/22/20a)

Here, the writer foregrounds his own successful agency in an adventurous episode that makes him appear heroic, which sharply contrasts with his everyday life governed by unwelcome forms of necessity – the modal 'mußte' clearly indicates a sense of obligation rather than mastery. The narrative transition from victim of circumstance to hero exemplifies what Dan P. McAdams has called the employment of 'personal myths', i.e. a 'heroic narrative of the self' constructed to illustrate 'essential truths' about the subject of enunciation,¹⁴ used here to deflect from the more worrisome memories of a stressful childhood, while at the same time suggesting capability when challenged.

Other such deflections from unwelcome topics manifest themselves at a stylistic level: rhetorical phrases, proverbs as well as hackneyed, formulaic sayings, while certainly also indicating school essay writing traditions of the time, are tellingly used to close down a theme with an edifying ending. Thus, looking back to the war, Kurt E. (1934) writes: 'Es ist schon ein großes Glück, wenn man da gesund davongekommen ist und seine Angehörigen und sein

Heim noch hat' (StadtAN E10/1/21/3). After reflections on post-war politics and Germany's future, Helmut M. (1931) finishes with the line: 'Es ruhen noch im Zeitenschoße / Die schwarzen und die heitern Lose' (StadtAN E10/1/101/25/7). And Gertrud K. (1935) concludes her life story with her biggest wish, namely that her father, who has been missing in action for three years, would return home soon, because 'dann freut mich mein junges Leben doppelt. Mit frischem Mut schaut die Jugend in die Zukunft' (StadtAN E10/1/21/39). The girl here integrates herself into a group of imagined young optimists.

In the essays, the pupils could avoid express discussion of politics, but in the questionnaires, direct political questions had to be answered. One of these read: 'Was ist nach deiner Meinung an unserem Unglück schuld?', a query which quite often resulted in platitudes or defiant evasions. Thus, Irmgard S. (1929) wrote: 'Nach meiner Meinung ist der Krieg an unserem Unglück schuld', and Hanni F. (1930) proclaimed: 'Wer an unserem Unglück schuld ist, entzieht sich meiner Kenntnis' (StadtAN E10/1/82/29 and 6). Many answers indicate either an unwillingness to engage or a frustration with politics as such: responses such as 'Ich bin kein Politiker' or 'Ich befasse mich nicht mit Politik' abound (StadtAN E10/1/82/4 and E10/1/84/23). The teacher Bernhard Schmid suspected that especially the questionnaire would have met with the parents' suspicions, 'weil dessen Inhalt zum eigenen Nachteil gereichen könnte'.¹⁵ In several responses, we read lines such as 'Darf ich nicht beantworten' or 'Ich darf von meinem Großvater nichts schreiben', often then even countersigned by a parent (StadtAN E10/1/45/6 or E10/1/45/19). One therefore has to be careful when diagnosing 'Politikverdrossenheit'. However, quite a few of the more reflective essays penned by the 'Gymnasiasten' display a similarly distrustful, though more explicitly articulated, attitude toward politics, e.g. when Dieter G. (1931) states: 'Jugendparteien suchen uns durch Schlagworte zu fangen. Wir aber sind skeptisch, verschlossen und mißtrauisch.

Wem sollen wir folgen? An welche Autorität sollen wir noch glauben?' (StadtAN E10/1/101/13/11).

Those pupils who look to the future rather more positively tend to be those who have found alternative belief systems, mostly in religion. Thus, Hermann Z., who had already been actively involved in church life during the war, effectively contrasts his descriptions of upheaval and volatility of life under the Nazis and his verdict that 'vieles hat sich im Vaterlande verändert' with an implicitly calming stability based on religious community as far as his own life is concerned: 'Ich habe mich freiwillig und aus innerer Überzeugung auf die Seite der katholischen Jugend gestellt. Sie verwirklicht meine Ideale, die Erfassung des ganzen Menschen im Geiste des Christentums' (StadtAN E10/1/101/16).

Other ethical orientations draw on traditional Prusso-Protestant virtues. Thus, numerous children, when asked in the questionnaire 'wie können wir nach deiner Meinung wieder in die Höhe kommen', pointed to 'Fleiß und harte Arbeit'. Economic recovery appeared to many as highly desirable – understandable given the material shortages the population had to put up with in the post-war era; but of course this materialistic orientation completely sidelines ethical considerations resulting from the crisis. The frequency with which the young suggested diligence and hard work as a solution raises the question whether they had not been primed to trot out these uncontroversial virtues, whether by teachers, parents, or general discussions in the media they might have noticed. Interestingly, it was the young girls especially who were concerned about sexual mores. Eleonore F. (1930) opined:

'Wir Jugendliche können nur so unserem Volke helfen, daß es wieder in die Höhe kommt, u. vor allem geachtet wird, indem wir uns nicht Ausländischen Angehörigen [sic] hingeben u. unsere Ehre dadurch nicht länger mit den Füßen treten lassen. Die

deutschen Frauen und Mädchen müssen wieder mehr geachtet werden' (StadtAN E10/1/84/10).

Margitta H.'s (1929) answer to the question 'Wie willst du dazu beitragen, daß unser Volk wieder leistungsfähig und geachtet wird?' reads 'Daß wir geistig und körperlich unsere Arbeit ausführen, und einen stolzen Charakter besitzen, und uns nicht mit den amerikanischen Soldaten abgeben. Denn das ist z.Zt. der tiefste Stand der deutschen Frau.' (StadtAN E10/1/88). Of course, the rejection of the Americans echoes National Socialist xenophobic propaganda, but the honour discourse also betrays fear of contempt.

The shame, confusion, and helplessness many of the adolescents must have felt when the war was lost also becomes tangible in their attempts to create what I call 'communities of responsibility' for what went wrong outside of the German people, e.g. by pointing the finger of blame at 'the Nazis', configured as somehow different from the (good) German people as such. Thus, when Willi B. (1931) talks about the approach of the American army, he says that the 'Lage war für die Nazis schon längst aussichtslos, aber sie gaben nicht nach, lieber sollte das ganze deutsche Volk mit zu Grunde gehen' (StadtAN E10/1/101/11). Another strategy to share the burden of responsibility was to claim that foreign nations, too, were not innocent. In that vein, Willi B. reproaches foreign countries for not having stopped National Socialism in good time: 'Mir ist heute unbegreiflich, warum das Ausland zusah, wie der Nationalsozialismus noch im Wachsen war und in [sic] nicht schon im Keime erstickte, oder das deutsche Volk aufklärte über die schlechten Ziele des Nazismus.' The boy points out that 'Staatsmänner aus aller Herren Länder' attended the Nuremberg party rallies, whilst today the Germans alone were being blamed. The implied sense of injustice also manifests itself in essays criticising the Nuremberg Trials, either perceived as an instance of 'victors' justice' or as a trial with the major culprits being absent.

Some pupils effectively relativise the wrongs committed under the Nazis by comparing them to the suffering experienced by the Germans: Dieter G. (1931) claims 'man erfährt alles von den KZ, was aber die deutsche Bevölkerung im Phosphorregen durchgestanden hat, was da für Greuel geschahen, davon spricht heute keiner mehr.' (StadtAN E10/1/101/13/12). Similarly, Helmuth H. asks: 'Haben aber die Polen, Tschechen, Juden, Franzosen usw. es nach Kriegsende nicht genau so gemacht, wie es in deutschen KZ-lagern, allerdings im Großen, vorkam. Man braucht ja nur Flüchtlinge, Ausgewiesene, Kriegsgefangene zu fragen.' (StadtAN E10/1/101/19). In these passages, 'competitive memory' manifests itself, i.e. a comparative approach to different historical contexts involving suffering with a view to relativising one particular context by pointing to another.¹⁶

All of the above discursive strategies of dealing with the Nazi past are effectively familiar from later and from adult tenets of German 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung'. This shows that the cited essays already display discourses which were to inform subsequent debates on how the Germans dealt with the Nazi past. To some extent, this is not so surprising: the pupils of 1946 grew up. Their post-war school work illustrates that they inscribed themselves into conflicts that were being negotiated in the adult world, that they imagined themselves as part of that German 'Volksgemeinschaft' which had become so very problematic a concept after the defeat of Nazi Germany. But there is one important card that could be played by the young only, and this was afforded by the age of Barthel's respondents, namely the argument that they had been too young to truly comprehend what had been going on during the Third Reich.

FINE YOUNG INNOCENTS

Where Nuremberg's adolescents thematise their youth, this usually occurs in the more reflective passages about the war, about German culpability, or about the pupils' own experience of and relationship to Nazi ideology. In these contexts, the children tend to represent themselves as either having been misguided by those in authority, as having been seduced by the 'fun and games' aspect of National Socialism, or as having been unable to understand the evil behind the façade because of their youth. As a result, they emerge as victims of circumstance, and pointing to the youth of the writers clearly serves the purpose of stressing childlike innocence. Thus, Kurt P. (1931) writes about the outbreak of the war: 'Da ich damals noch ein Kind war, konnte ich die Tragweite dieses Geschehnisses nicht begreifen.' (StadtAN E10/1/101/29/2). And Sonja S. (1931) presents herself as a girl who learnt the hard way what war means, integrating herself into the victim group of defenceless women, children, and the elderly, as if male adults had had a better chance to survive an air raid: 'Aber als Kind begreift man nicht was das Wort Krieg bedeutet. Erst als 1941 die ersten Fliegerangriffe auch die Ruhe der Heimat störten, kam mir zum Bewußtsein, welche Gefahr auch die wehrlosen Frauen, Kinder und Greise stets umschwebte.' (StadtAN E10/1/87/22).

Walter B. (no d.o.b.) wrote: 'Mit sieben Jahren kam ich in die Schule. Mit großen Augen bestaunte ich diese neue Welt, die sich mir erschloß. Nichts störte bis dahin mein Kinderglück. Ich hörte von der Besetzung des Sudetenlands und von Östreich [sic], ich hörte die Erwachsenen vom Kriege sprechen, doch was kümmerte es mich? Ich verstand es ja gar nicht.' (StadtAN E10/1/101/21). Here, the foregrounding of the boy's wide-eyed naivety is used to point to his innocent incomprehension of the politics with which he was confronted when entering school, although 'die Erwachsenen' is vague and potentially includes adults from outside the school context. Richard W. (1930) claims he had been too young to question

Nazi ideology, which he had been taught at primary school: 'Um der Sache auf den Grund zu gehen, war ich damals noch zu jung. Politik kümmerte mich überhaupt nicht. Unsere Anschauung wurde uns schon in der Volksschule beigebracht' (StadtAN E10/1/101/35/1-2). The ideological indoctrination at school in Nazi Germany has, of course, been well documented in contemporaneous policy publications and textbooks, by scholars, and by recollections of the victims of discrimination.¹⁷ Where pupils testify to the presence of war-mongering in school, thus linking the lived context of the classroom to world politics, it tends to be with an apologetic or defiant attitude. For example, Richard W. (1930) addresses the militaristic indoctrination received at school: 'In der Volksschule gefiel es mir sehr gut. [...] Dafür, daß wir das 1x1 mit Panzern und Flugzeugen rechneten, konnte dieser Mann [=der Lehrer, B.M.] nichts. Das lag im Geiste der Zeit und im Rechenbuch stand es ja genauso.' (StadtAN E10/1/101/35/2). Defending the teacher by pointing to the 'Zeitgeist' and the authority of the officially sanctioned textbook indirectly also exonerates the pupil(s) from any responsibility for their ideological beliefs held at the time.

The essays of the few who clearly identify themselves as (former) ardent Nazis show conflicting evaluations. Thus, Horst K. (1931), who openly addresses the fact that he had happily attended one of the elite Adolf-Hitler-Schulen, claims 'Ich habe den Nationalsozialismus in seiner anderen, unheilvollen Gestalt, nie kennen gelernt. Ich sah nur, daß die Menschen glücklich und zufrieden ihrer Arbeit nachgingen, daß allenthalben in Deutschland Großes und Schönes geschaffen wurde.' (StadtAN E10/1/101/22/3). In this example, National Socialism appears as two-faced, a Jekyll who never let young Horst see Mr Hyde, which becomes the implied explanation and apology for the boy's support of the movement. The indicative mode – people *were* happy and content, they did not just appear to be so; in Germany, great and beautiful things *were* being created, rather than a semblance

thereof – might well point to an ideological orientation on the part of the adolescent in question that defeat and reeducation had done little to change.

Life was easier for those who had not supported the Nazis, as they could side with the critics of the regime. Helmut M. (1931) complains about the 'verhaßten HJ-Dienst' and remembers how he and like-minded comrades had hoped for peace:

Oft saß ich mit gleichgesinnten Kameraden zusammen und wir ersehnten ein baldiges Ende des Krieges herbei. Wäre unser Wunsch in Erfüllung gegangen, wie viel wäre dem deutschen Volke erspart geblieben. [...] 1941 mußte ich dem Jungvolk beitreten. Dort wurde uns nun alles verherrlicht. [...] Der Zwang, mit dem die ganze Sache behaftet war, paßte mir schon nach kurzer Zeit nicht mehr und meine anfängliche Begeisterung flaute bald ab. Ich erschien immer seltener beim "Antreten", was mir und meinen Eltern oft übel angerechnet wurde. (StadtAN E10/1/101/25/4-5 and 3)

Interestingly, the writer of this narrative does not take recourse to youthful innocence: on the contrary, the narrator appears as somebody who had seen through the regime long before its end was nigh.

CONCLUSION

Talking about perpetrator nations in the early post-war years, Stefan Berger claims that '[r]emembering the nation's own victims went alongside widespread silence about those victims perceived as not belonging to the nation. This is particularly true for the victims of the Holocaust.'¹⁸ Such an eclipse rested on the perception of the 'Volksgemeinschaft' as

essentially good victims. The Nuremberg essays illustrate this general tendency in that they sideline any form of more active, more harmful support many of the young might well have lent the Nazis, e.g. by bullying ethnically, racially or politically defined 'enemies' of the people, or by informing on family members, friends, colleagues or neighbours – there is simply no admission of any wrongdoing by the young, neither before, nor during or after the war. The persecution of the Jews or of political opponents of the Hitler regime, for instance, is only addressed in those very few essays which were written by the persecuted themselves. But direct questions yielded a very different picture: in the first of the two questionnaires used, when asked 'Was war falsch und Unrecht und irrtümlich bei den NS', numerous respondents identified racial and ethnic persecution as a major wrong (StadtAN E10/1/103/1-10). This contrast between the essays and the questionnaires might of course mean that the young, when questioned directly, simply wrote what they thought was expected of them, but it could also indicate an inability to integrate the National Socialist past into their own narrated biographies, and thus to take ownership of this highly problematic heritage. Instead, the life stories revolve around their adolescent authors' own sufferings, and youthful innocence is invoked for exculpatory purposes where possibilities of responsibility and ideological involvement arise.

If McAdams is right in saying that in adolescence, people start creating an 'ideological setting' for their personal myths in order to contextualise their story in an ethical framework, and that they do so by drawing on imagery and fantasy from their earlier childhood,¹⁹ then Germany's young would have faced particular challenges in the immediate post-war period, because what was deemed to be right and what wrong, what was regarded as true and what as false, changed dramatically with the collapse of the Nazi regime. Therefore, ethically-informed identity construction – personal myths – through life story narratives as instigated by Barthel, would have been conflictual exercises, because the clashing values of Nazi

Germany and of occupied Germany could not be reconciled with each other. This meant that creating coherent, meaningful narratives of self in an 'act of imagination that is a patterned integration of our remembered past, perceived present, and anticipated future' (ibid., p. 12) must have felt like squaring the proverbial circle, given the disruptive impact of war and the ideological U-turn subsequent to German surrender. No wonder, then, that many of Nuremberg's adolescent pupils emphasised their youth to regain entry into the mythical lost paradise of childhood innocence.

Studying the early post-war school essays furthers our understanding of just how existential the crisis must have been for many; the shock, which is voiced more clearly and directly in many of the youngsters' essays than in contemporaneous adults' commentaries, helps explain why so many Germans at the time chose to look forward toward rebuilding the country, rather than backward in order to engage with the difficult legacies of the Third Reich. On the face of it, this 'Flucht nach vorn' united the generations, irrespective of the pupils' cited attempts at portraying themselves as young innocents. But behind the common intergenerational zeal for the material reconstruction of rubble Germany, rifts appeared that set the post-war youth apart from their elders. As early as 1957, the sociologist Helmut Schelsky famously spoke of those who had grown up under Hitler as the 'skeptical generation', characterised by their wariness of political ideology.²⁰ A burnt child dreads the fire.

1 Lydia G. (born 1929) in her 1946 essay about her life (Stadtarchiv Nürnberg, Nachlass Barthel, StadtAN E10/1/82/8). Further references to this collection appear in the text. The archival work undertaken in Nuremberg for this article was funded by a British Academy/Leverhulme Small Research Grant for a project on 'Children in German War (Con)-Texts, 1945-1949', financial support which is gratefully acknowledged. Hannes Heer published an edition of some of these school essays under the title *Als ich 9 Jahre alt war, kam der Krieg: Ein Lesebuch gegen den Krieg*, Reinbek 1983 [Cologne 1980].

2 James F. Tent, *Mission on the Rhine: Reeducation and Denazification in American-Occupied Germany*, Chicago 1984, p. 12.

3 *Handbook for Military Government in Germany*. December 1944. Section III, paragraph 812. Available online at http://www.history.army.mil/reference/Finding%20Aids/Mil_gov.pdf (accessed 5 December 2014).

4 *Ibid.*, paragraph 814.

5 Brian M. Puaca, *Learning Democracy: Education Reform in West Germany, 1945-1965*, New York and Oxford 2010, p. 15. On the denazification process in Nuremberg, see Neil Gregor, *Haunted City: Nuremberg and the Nazi Past*, New Haven and London 2008, pp. 88-103.

6 Boyd L. Dastrup, 'Laying the Foundation for Democracy in Nuremberg', *Fires Bulletin*, January-February 2009, pp. 41-5 (p. 41).

7 Otto Barthel, *Die Schulen in Nürnberg 1905-1960*, Nuremberg 1964, p. 62.

8 Helen Liddell, 'Education in Occupied Germany: A Field Survey', in: *Education in Occupied Germany. L'Éducation de L'Allemagne occupée*, ed. Helen Liddell, Paris 1949, pp. 97-148 (p. 119).

9 For summaries of these OMGUS surveys, see *Public Opinion in Occupied Germany*, ed. Anna J. Merritt and Richard L. Merritt, Chicago and London 1970. – The Nuremberg school essays on wartime issues and their aftermath are not the only such ones penned in the early post-war period: in East Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg area, about 1,300 pupils composed essays about their recollections and their present-day lives under Soviet occupation. For a selective edition of these essays, see *'Ich schlug meiner Mutter die brennenden Funken ab': Berliner Schulaufsätze aus dem Jahr 1946*, selected and introd. by Annett Gröschner, Berlin 1996. – Alex Lloyd analyses these Berlin essays elsewhere in this volume.

10 *Learning Democracy*.

11 Jaimey Fisher, *Disciplining Germany: Youth, Reeducation, and Reconstruction after the Second World War*, Detroit 2007, p. 2.

12 Catherine Kohler Riessman, 'Analysis of Personal Narratives', in *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft*, ed. Jaber F. Gubrium et al., 2nd ed., Los Angeles et al. 2012, pp. 367-79 (p. 368).

13 Heer, *Als ich 9 Jahre alt war, kam der Krieg*, p. 224.

14 Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*, New York 1993, p. 11.

15 Schmid's letter dated 6 January 1947, StadtAN E10/1/42.

16 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Stanford 2009, p. 9.

17 See for instance *Die Volksschule im NS-Staat*, repr. Breslau 1940; *Die deutsche Volksschule im Großdeutschen Reich: Handbuch der Gesetze, Verordnungen und Richtlinien für Erziehung und Unterricht in Volksschulen nebst den einschlägigen Bestimmungen über Hitler-Jugend und nationalpolitische Erziehungsanstalten*, introd. Hans Jürgen Apel and Michael Klöcker, Cologne, Weimar and Wien 2000; Kurt-Ingo Flessau, *Schule der Diktatur*,

Munich 1977; Hans-Jochen Gamm, *Führung und Verführung: Pädagogik des Nationalsozialismus*, Munich 1990; Benjamin Ortmeier (ed.), *Berichte gegen Vergessen und Verdrängen von 100 überlebenden jüdischen Schülerinnen und Schülern über die NS-Zeit in Frankfurt am Main*, Witterschlick/Bonn 1995.

18 Stefan Berger, 'Remembering the Second World War in Western Europe, 1945-2005', in *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*, ed. Małgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth, New York and Oxford 2012 [2010], pp. 119-36 (p. 122).

19 McAdams, *The Stories We Live By*, p. 13.

20 Helmut Schelsky, *Die skeptische Generation: Eine Soziologie der deutschen Jugend*, Düsseldorf 1957.